

The Theological Dimensions of *Basar* Songs from the Kei Islands, Indonesia

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Abstract

This article aims to explore the theological dimensions embedded in *Basar*, a traditional ceremonial song of the Kei people in Southeast Maluku, particularly in its interaction with the Catholic faith. Using Robert J. Schreier's cultural semiotic method, comprising sign (melody), rule (ritual context), and message (life themes), this study reveals that *Basar* carries messages of reverence and gratitude rooted in the *Larvul Ngabal* customary law. These messages reflect a religious-spiritual worldview in which reverence for community leaders is understood as reverence for Christ (Christological dimension), and gratitude to *Duad*—the local term for God—is reinterpreted as gratitude to the Triune God (Trinitarian dimension). Thus, *Basar* functions not merely as a cultural artifact but as a theological resource capable of liturgical inculturation and contextual theological reflection within the Kei Catholic community.

Keywords: Contextual theology, *Basar*, *Larvul Ngabal*, inculturation, Kei

Introduction

Cultural identity has now become a central locus in constructing genuinely contextual theology. On this point, Stephen B. Bevans notes, “Today, alongside the sharpening focus on national identity and the growing awareness of the cultural conditioning of all theology, cultural identity seems to have become the primary locus for the reconstruction of truly contextual theologies” (Bevans, 2020, p. 46). The Church recognizes the cultural heritage of nations, with all its goodness, as a valuable factor in carrying out its mission in the world (Paul VI, 1965).

In the context of the Church's missionary dynamic, the call to contextualize faith is not merely a pastoral strategy but a theological imperative. In *Ecclesia in Asia* (John Paul II, 1999), it is stated that the Gospel must be incarnated into local cultures in order for its proclamation to become more authentic and relevant (EA 21–22). Evangelization should not only employ universal ecclesial expressions but must also penetrate the structures of meaning embedded in each cultural community. Liturgical adaptation, in this regard, serves as a significant paradigm for bridging Christian faith and local culture (Paul VI, 1963). The Church values and promotes the spiritual riches of various peoples. Whatever in their way of life is not indissolubly bound up with superstition or error she studies with sympathy and, if possible, preserves intact. Sometimes She even admits it into the liturgy itself, provided it harmonizes with the true and authentic spirit of the liturgy (SC 37).

The people of Kei, in Southeast Maluku, possess a rich cultural tradition that offers meaningful values for theological contextualization. This cultural tradition finds expression in many forms, including musical expressions such as ethnic songs. Claartje Gieben and colleagues point out that the Kei people possess a great variety of songs and dances, many of which are performed during traditional ceremonies. One such type of song that remains vibrant within the Kei community is the *Basar* song (Gieben et al., 1984, p. 60). This type of song, widely recognized today, is essentially one part of a trilogy known as *Sosoi-Basar*, comprising three traditional songs performed alongside three corresponding dances in ceremonial contexts—namely *Sosoi*, *Hain Yerik*, and *Basar*. Each song is inseparably tied to the specific dance it accompanies: *Sosoi* with the *Sosoi* dance, *Hain Yerik* with the *Hain Yerik* dance, and *Basar* with the *Basar* dance.

This article focuses on the *Basar* song as the object of theological investigation. *Basar* songs are generally classified into three types, each with distinct musical characteristics. In practice, *Basar* can be performed either individually (a single type) or in combination (two or three types in succession). Typically, the combined performance follows a conventional sequence in which the slower-tempo *Basar* precedes the medium or faster types. This sequencing enhances the performance's dynamic and expressive quality.

As a form of Kei ethnic music, *Basar* functions as a reflection on life themes through the harmony of melody and lyric. Thus, it serves not only as entertainment or artistic expression but also as a medium of value transmission, symbolism, and spiritual relation deeply rooted in the local cultural atmosphere (Renyaan et al., 2020, p. 52; Rumengan, 2017, p. 10). As a medium of *snib* (message transmission), the primary function of *Basar* is to help community members internalize the values and customs founded upon *Larvul Ngabal*—Kei's customary

law, which forms the structural order of its cultural life (Rumengan, 2017, p. 241; Silubun, 2020, p. 321). Accordingly, *Basar* holds a collective role in customary ceremonies as a vehicle for expressing reverence and gratitude and fostering social cohesion.

In the liturgical inculturation practices of Kei, musical elements of *Basar* have already been incorporated into Church hymns (Komisi Liturgi Keuskupan Amboina, 1997, 2019). Research shows that these musical elements have often been adapted into the inculturated *Ordinarium Missae* (e.g., *Misa Duta*, *Misa Tavitik*, *Misa Umat*). The use of the Kei language and *Basar* musical idioms in liturgical hymns represents a tangible effort toward inculturation. However, like many inculturation initiatives, this approach has often been pragmatic and lacks thorough theological reflection (Martasudjita, 2014, p. 60). Moreover, no theological study has yet focused on *Basar* itself. This reveals a gap between practical implementation and conceptual theological reflection in the inculturation process. In other words, *Basar* has not yet been recognized as a theological source in the discourse of liturgical inculturation in Kei. As such, this article seeks to address that gap by uncovering the theological dimensions of *Basar* in its interaction with Catholic faith.

The effort to explore the theological dimensions of *Basar* is essentially a conscious attempt to articulate Christian faith in relation to the lived realities of believers within Kei culture. Theology, in essence, is always shaped by specific contexts—be it cultural or socio-historical (Bevans, 2020, p. 1). Robert J. Schreiter emphasizes that constructing local theology does not begin with translating universal Church tradition into local forms but with a deep study of culture itself. This process entails identifying and analyzing cultural texts—signs, rules, messages, metaphors, and semiotic fields. Understanding these cultural texts provides insight into cultural identity and how communities engage with social change. These texts then become both the unit of analysis and the focus of local theological reflection (Schreiter, 1991, pp. 104–118).

It must be emphasized that while culture serves as the starting point for contextual theology, local theologies must remain engaged with the universal faith tradition of the Church. Without this continuity, local theology risks detachment from the Church's faith heritage (Schreiter, 1991, pp. 64, 169). Both Schreiter and Bevans share this conviction about the mutual relationship between local cultural contexts and the Church's faith tradition. Bevans articulates this relationship in what he calls the “synthesizing model”: “What the synthetic model points to is the opportunity for a culture to be transformed by its content and dialogue with other cultures, thought forms, etc., including its encounter with Christianity” (Bevans, 1985, p. 195). The synthesis model balances continuity and change within the life of faith. Bevans even suggests that Schreiter has his own form of the synthesizing model, which can be called the “semiotic model” (Bevans, 2020, p. 173).

From this theoretical perspective, fidelity to dogma and Church teaching is maintained while remaining open to new interpretations based on contextual challenges and local cultural values. The application of this perspective is considered appropriate for societies undergoing rapid social and cultural change, as it is able to preserve the identity of faith while also allowing for transformation. Given the space for interaction and collaboration between the Church's faith tradition and the lived experience of the faithful, as well as attention to the rapidly changing

climate, this theory is deemed suitable for use in pastorally oriented studies (Lina et al., 2023; Tibo et al., 2024), including this paper.

Method

This study adopts a qualitative research approach (Sarosa, 2021), integrated with a cultural semiotic analysis rooted in the theoretical framework of Robert J. Schreiter (Schreiter, 1991). This combined method was deliberately selected to accommodate the complexity and richness of the object of inquiry—*Basar*, a ceremonial song of the Kei people—whose structure is laden with symbolic significance, emotional depth, and embedded layers of spiritual and communal values. The qualitative design enables the researcher to explore these dimensions holistically, interpreting *Basar* not merely as a traditional musical expression, but as a living cultural text that intersects with the faith life of local Catholic communities. In this sense, *Basar* becomes both a social and theological artifact, worthy of in-depth interpretive analysis.

The data collection process involved a combination of in-depth interviews and documentary studies focusing on the tradition of Kei ethnic songs. Interviews were conducted with individuals recognized as cultural bearers, including traditional leaders, ceremonial practitioners, and Catholic believers who possess a nuanced understanding of the spiritual-symbolic context in which *Basar* is performed. These informants were chosen purposively for their experiential knowledge and roles within the community. Additional data were obtained from archival recordings, song manuscripts, and written documents preserved within both the local society and the Church. To optimize the depth and consistency of the insights gathered, the interviews followed a semi-structured format, which allowed for flexible yet focused engagement with each respondent.

For the analytical process, the study applies Schreiter's cultural semiotics, focusing on three central analytical categories: signs, rules, and messages. *Signs* are understood as tangible elements—such as melodic structures, rhythmic patterns, poetic language, or nature-based metaphors—that appear in the song. *Rules* refer to the ritual, social, and ceremonial conventions that define when, where, and how *Basar* is appropriately performed. *Messages* are the spiritual and theological meanings conveyed, which may be articulated either directly or symbolically through performance. This triadic model allows the researcher to move beyond the surface of artistic expression and access the theological depth that resides within indigenous ritual music.

Ultimately, this methodological framework seeks to uncover the implicit theology encoded in *Basar*—not simply as an emblem of Kei identity, but as a medium of faith articulation and a liturgical-theological resource that remains active in the lived spirituality of the community.

Findings and Discussion

Sociocultural Context of the Kei People

Geographically, the Kei Archipelago is a cluster of islands located in the Banda Sea, west of the Aru Islands and southeast of Seram Island. The total area, including both land and

sea, spans approximately 14,768 square kilometers, with land comprising only about 20% of this area. The archipelago is divided into four main island groups: Kei Besar (*Nuhu Yuut*), Kei Kecil (*Nuhu Roa*), Dullah Island (*Nuhu Tavun* or *Tua-Du*), and the Tayando and Kur Islands (*Nuhu Taam-Tayad*). Administratively, the region falls under two government jurisdictions: Southeast Maluku Regency (covering Kei Besar and Kei Kecil) and Tual City (encompassing Dullah Island and the Tayando Islands). According to 2024 data from the Central Bureau of Statistics of Maluku Province, the total population of the Kei Islands is 218,989, with 126,245 residing in Southeast Maluku Regency and 92,744 in Tual City (DPMPTSP Maluku, n.d.).

The land in the Kei Islands is generally composed of coral-based terrain, with a thin topsoil layer ranging from 5 to 15 centimeters. The top layer typically consists of red or black soil, while the sublayer is rich in white limestone. In Kei Besar, the soil is slightly more fertile due to a thicker layer of humus. Overall, the region does not feature extensive homogeneous forests, aside from scattered mangrove areas along certain coastlines. Vegetation is largely heterogeneous, consisting of various native tree species such as ironwood, *lenggua*, sago, bamboo, and others that grow naturally in diverse environments. Over time, the Kei people, traditionally subsistence farmers and fishermen, have diversified their livelihoods into various occupations, including civil service, entrepreneurship, and political engagement (Ohoitumur, 1996, pp. 21–23).

The commonly spoken local language throughout the islands is *Veve Evav*, or the Kei language. In terms of the arts, the Kei people are known for their deep appreciation of music and dance, which have been integral to their way of life for generations. They possess a rich repertoire of songs and dances performed during traditional ceremonies. Traditional instruments still in use today include the *tifa* (drum), *severngil* (flute), and *deda* (gong). Among these, the *tifa* is the most widely used, serving both as accompaniment in artistic performances and as a rhythmic tool in rowing and other communal activities (Gieben et al., 1984, pp. 60–64).

Another defining element of Kei culture is its legal and philosophical system. Oral traditions, moral teachings, etiquette, and communal values are embedded in stories (*tom*) and customary messages (*snib*), all of which are encapsulated within the customary law known as *Larvul Ngabal*. This law provides a systematic and holistic framework for human life, encompassing morality, ethics, and social justice, and functions as the normative foundation for the Kei people's societal order. To this day, *Larvul Ngabal* continues to shape the everyday lives of the Kei community (Ohoitumur, 1996, pp. 16–28; Silubun, 2020). Like the Kei language, elements of Kei law, philosophy, and aesthetics are practiced broadly across the entire archipelago.

Historically, the Kei people adhered to animistic beliefs (Ohoitumur, 1996, pp. 33–34). Over time, they gradually converted to religions introduced by external missionaries. Today, the population adheres to major world religions, including Catholicism, Islam, Protestantism, and Hinduism (Refo, 2015, pp. 7–13). Despite this shift, customary values remain deeply embedded in both consciousness and social practice, continuing to influence community life across Kei cultural groups.

Value System and Religious-Spiritual Aspects of Kei Society

Every ethnic group and nation cultivates characteristic patterns of behavior shaped by a set of values that form the basis for thinking, feeling, and acting—whether in relation to others, the natural world, or the Divine. As a distinct cultural community, the Kei people express their worldview through a unique behavioral code, which is deeply rooted in a system of values derived from their customary law, known as *Larvul Ngabal*.

Any meaningful discussion of Kei values must begin with *Larvul Ngabal*. This customary law plays a central role in regulating behaviour and ordering the entire social system. “As an institution tasked with guiding and regulating conduct, *Larvul Ngabal* has the authority to demand accountability from those who violate it. This authority is upheld by customary leaders, especially the kings” (Ohoitumur, 1996, p. 5). *Larvul Ngabal* is held in such high regard that, traditionally, it could only be discussed in special settings, such as during customary ceremonies or formal educational gatherings. Today, however, it has become the subject of study across generations. Given its foundational significance, it is no surprise that the Kei people often identify themselves by reference to *Larvul Ngabal*.

This customary law comprises seven foundational articles, each encapsulating core values of Kei moral and social life (Ohoitumur, 1996, pp. 5–9; Silubun, 2020, p. 66). The first article, *Uud entauk atvunad*, emphasizes the symbolic role of the head resting on the shoulders, signifying leadership and divine order. The second, *Lelad ain fo mahiling*, speaks to the noble, pure, and dignified nature of the neck, representing the sacred connection between the divine and the human. The third article, *Ul nit envil atumud*, refers to the skin that wraps the body, symbolizing unity and human integrity. The fourth, *Lar nakmot ivud*, portrays blood gathered in the stomach, signifying inner strength and familial lineage. The fifth article, *Rek fo kelmutun*, underscores the importance of honoring and upholding boundaries as expressions of respect and communal order. The sixth, *Moryain fo mahiling*, declares the marital bed to be sacred and unblemished, reflecting the high value placed on purity and marital fidelity. Finally, the seventh article, *Hira ni fo i ni, it did fo it did*, affirms the principle that what belongs to others must remain theirs, and what belongs to us must remain ours—emphasizing property rights and social justice. These seven articles are systematically grouped into three overarching categories: *Nevnev Law* (Articles 1–4), which governs personal integrity and human life; *Hanilit Law* (Articles 5–6), which regulates moral conduct and ethical behavior; and *Hawear Balwirin Law* (Article 7), which addresses principles of justice and communal responsibility. Each category is elaborated through a list of violations called *sasa sor fit* (sevenfold transgressions), which range in severity and include corresponding sanctions. These classifications help the community identify the relationship between specific violations and the core articles of *Larvul Ngabal* (Ohoitumur, 1996, pp. 5–11).

As the foundational source of values and norms in Kei society, *Larvul Ngabal* serves as a reference point in multiple domains: legal, socio-political, moral, educational, literary, spiritual, and environmental (Silubun, 2020, pp. 103–346). In the context of this article, the focus is on the religious and spiritual dimensions of this customary law.

Larvul Ngabal not only provides ethical and social guidance but also serves as a

theological framework that governs human relations with the Divine—referred to in Kei culture as *Duad* (God). Spirituality in Kei society is not treated as an isolated belief system but is deeply integrated into customary norms and practices. *Larvul Ngabal* functions as a "living text" that teaches morality, social ethics, and reverence toward a transcendent power that sustains the world. Consequently, religious and spiritual values in Kei life are inseparable from the overall structure of customary law that binds the community (cf. Ohoitumur, 1996, p. 32).

Without intending to fragment the holistic structure of *Larvul Ngabal*, we may highlight certain sections that explicitly address spiritual matters. Notably, Articles 1 and 2 pertain to the spiritual dimension of Kei life (Silubun, 2020, p. 85). Article 1, "*Uud entauk atvunad*" ("The head rests on the shoulders"), symbolically represents *Duad* as Creator, Ruler, and ultimate Judge. Just as the head governs the body, so too does *Duad* govern all creation with authority and justice. Simultaneously, this "head" also refers to community leaders and elders, who are considered the earthly manifestations of the Divine. These figures are often described as *Duad kebay*, the immanent God, who embody divine attributes in society. In this worldview, parental discipline and leadership are framed by a conception of *Duad* as a stern and righteous judge (Ohoitumur, 1996, p. 6).

Article 2, "*Lelad ain fo malihing*" ("The neck is noble, pure, and dignified"), emphasizes the sanctity of the relationship between human beings and *Duad*. In this symbolic framework, the neck represents the vital link between head (God) and body (human life), underscoring the importance of purity in maintaining spiritual and moral order. This relationship is sustained through adherence to *Larvul Ngabal*'s norms, not merely as a social obligation but as an act of reverence toward *Duad*, the ultimate lawgiver. To live in accordance with this law is to honor *Duad* Himself (Ohoitumur, 1996, p. 32; Silubun, 2020, p. 86).

In the value system of Kei society, religious and spiritual life stands at the center, serving as the foundation that supports its ethical, social, and cultural frameworks. Spirituality does not exist as a separate dimension but permeates every norm and practice in daily life. *Duad*'s role as lawgiver and sustainer of cosmic order undergirds the entire value system. Every moral act, leadership role, and social interaction is thus referenced back to a right relationship with the Divine. Consequently, *Larvul Ngabal* is not merely a formal legal structure but a living embodiment of Kei spiritual consciousness, regulating not only human relations but also humanity's relationship with God in a holistic and enduring way.

The Basar Song and Its Religious-Spiritual Dimension

Spirituality is the deepest aspect of human existence, involving one's existential relationship with the transcendent, with others, with nature, and with the self (Fisher, 1998). It transcends material or external realities, touching on meaning, life's purpose, and the core values that undergird a person's or community's life. In his encyclical *Redemptoris Missio*, Pope John Paul II speaks of the religious and spiritual dimensions present in traditional cultures (John Paul II, 1990). He affirms that such cultures often embody authentic religious values and sincere spiritual expressions, even if not yet fully illuminated by the Gospel (RM 52). In exploring the religious-spiritual dimension of the *Basar* song, the central question is: How does

Basar, as a cultural text of the Kei people, express the human relationship with the Divine within the framework of Kei belief systems and customary values?

To answer this, *Basar* must be analyzed semiotically. As a cultural text, *Basar* is approached through three primary indicators: sign, rule, and message. *Sign* refers to the melody; *rule* refers to the customary regulations regarding when and how it is performed; and *message* refers to the thematic or existential meanings it conveys. The following descriptions and analyses of *Basar* are framed using this semiotic perspective.

The melody of *Basar* features distinct musical characteristics built on elements such as tone, rhythm, and tempo (cf. Rumengan, 2024, p. 245). Based on these elements, *Basar* is categorized into three types. The first type has a calm, flowing, and majestic melody with major intervals and recognizable phrasing. Its rhythm resembles a 3/4 meter with a steady, slow tempo. The second type features a brighter, more cheerful melody, still using major intervals and distinctive phrasing, with a 2/4 rhythm and a slightly faster tempo than the first. The third type is distinguished by a unique sequence of musical phrases and melodic patterns that differ from the first two, but still retains major tonalities, clear rhythms, and a similar tempo to the second type.

Basar is performed with the accompaniment of a traditional Kei drum known as *tiva*. This instrument maintains rhythmic stability and sets the tempo. For the first type of *Basar*, the *tiva basar* beat is used—marked by simple, flowing rhythms aligned with a 3/4 meter and slow tempo (approximately 73–79 beats per minute). The second and third types use the *tiva soso* beat, which has livelier and more varied rhythms with a moderate tempo (around 80–90 beats per minute).

Culturally, the performance of *Basar* is governed by two main rules: its inseparable link with the *Basar* dance and its association with ceremonies of reverence and gratitude. *Basar* is always performed in conjunction with the *Basar* dance and is typically presented collectively during major public rituals. It is never performed in isolation from dance. These rituals fall into two general categories: (1) ceremonies honoring prominent individuals or respected guests, and (2) ceremonies expressing communal gratitude for significant events. As a result, *Basar* is strongly associated with the themes of *reverence* and *thanksgiving*. For Kei people, hearing *Basar* immediately evokes associations with ceremonial expressions of honor or gratitude.

The message of *Basar* emerges from the dynamic interaction between its melody and the ceremonial context in which it is performed. Thus, the song's message is inseparable from the celebration it accompanies—namely, reverence and gratitude. Though the specific form of each ritual may vary by community or context, the thematic focus remains consistent. This explains why the lyrics of *Basar* songs may vary, while the core themes are always centered on expressions of reverence and thanksgiving. In short, the message of *Basar* arises from the synergy between melody and ritual context.

The melody (*sign*), the ceremonial context (*rule*), and the themes of reverence and gratitude (*message*) form an interrelated semiotic structure. The interaction of these elements constitutes a *sign system*, which generates the meaning conveyed in *Basar*. Importantly, this message is not formed in isolation, it is shaped and interpreted within the broader web of Kei cultural meaning, or what Schreiter calls a “constellation of meaning” (cf. Schreiter, 1991, p. 119). Included in this constellation is the value system of *Larvul Ngabal*, which regulates

relationships among humans, nature, and *Duad* (God). Thus, the *Basar* song's message of *reverence* and *gratitude* also reflects Kei conceptions of the human-divine relationship (cf. Foley, 2015, p. ix; Maggiani et al., 1998, p. 317).

The message of *reverence* is most vividly expressed when *Basar* is sung (with accompanying dance) during ceremonies honoring leaders or elders. This act of honoring is rooted in the Kei worldview that sees community leaders as earthly representatives of *Duad*. This understanding is grounded in the symbolic meaning of *Uud* (Head) from Article 1 of *Larvul Ngabal*, which refers to *Duad* as the supreme source of life and authority. As the transcendent Spirit dwelling in the sun and moon, *Duad* is linked to social and familial leaders, who embody divine qualities through their exemplary conduct under the law of *Larvul Ngabal*.

The message of *gratitude* is equally evident when *Basar* is performed during celebratory ceremonies, for instance, to express joy and thanks for a bountiful harvest, the arrival of an esteemed guest, or a wedding procession. The sense of communal gratitude stems from the belief that all blessings are gifts from *Duad*. These blessings are seen as a reward for the community's faithful observance of the values and norms embedded in *Larvul Ngabal*.

Thus, the *Basar* song reveals a religious-spiritual dimension through its recurring themes of *reverence* and *thanksgiving*. These are not merely expressions of human appreciation toward leaders or elders but point to a deeper recognition of the Divine presence they represent. In Kei cultural life, such leaders are not seen solely as human authorities but as vessels of sacred authority. Hence, *Basar* as a ritual song becomes a form of spiritual expression, a means of articulating the human relationship with the Divine. Through its symbols and rites, Kei culture sacralizes the social order, in which the sacred and the profane are not sharply divided but interwoven into a coherent constellation of cultural meaning.

The Theological Dimensions of Basar

Through the messages of *reverence* and *gratitude* conveyed in *Basar*, one can discern religious-spiritual values that point toward *Duad* (God). *Duad* functions as the divine recipient of these messages, grounding them in a theologically significant direction. The discussion of *Basar*'s theological dimensions is thus rooted in these spiritual meanings. That is, the religious-spiritual aspects of *Basar* – as culturally embedded, noble, and true – represent a latent theological potential within Kei tradition that may be elevated and fulfilled for the glory of God and the good of humankind (*Ad Gentes* 9). The Church, therefore, seeks to examine these cultural treasures with discernment and, where appropriate, integrate them into the life of faith, liturgical celebration, and community enrichment (*AG* 22).

When *Basar* is performed in ceremonies honoring community leaders or elders, it communicates reverence for *Duad*. The authority of such leaders is ultimately rooted in their role as reflections of *Duad*, the Head of life. Their leadership and moral witness—governed by the values of *Larvul Ngabal*—manifest the presence of the Divine within the human community. This Kei understanding of leaders and elders as *Duad kebav* (the immanent God) resonates with the Christian doctrine of God's immanence, particularly in the person of Christ, who is the perfect image of the Father (John 14:9). Christ became human to fulfill the salvific

mission of God, culminating in the Paschal Mystery (John 3:16; Phil 2:6–8). This Christological mystery is what the Church celebrates in the liturgy (*SC* 6) and what provides a foundational reference for inculturation efforts (Martasudjita, 2021, p. 267).

Given this harmony between the theme of *Duad*'s immanence and Christian Christology, the ethnosemiotic meaning structure of *Basar* may be transformed into a Christian constellation of meaning. Through this transformation, *Basar*'s theme of reverence acquires a Christological interpretation: it becomes an act of reverence toward Jesus Christ, the Head of the Church and perfect image of the Father, who is made present through the Holy Spirit in the Eucharist (Col 1:18; *SC* 7). This is the *christological dimension* of *Basar*'s message of reverence as reinterpreted through the lens of Christian faith.

Similarly, when *Basar* is performed in communal thanksgiving rituals (e.g., for abundant harvests, the arrival of a dignitary, or weddings), it articulates a sense of gratitude directed toward *Duad*. These thanksgiving celebrations express the community's collective awareness that all good things are gifts from *Duad*—a divine reward for faithful adherence to the norms of *Larvul Ngabal*.

The Kei understanding of *Duad* includes three notable characteristics: (1) *Duad* is an all-powerful transcendent being; (2) *Duad* is identical with spirit; and (3) *Duad* engages actively in human affairs through leaders (Ohoitmur, 1996, pp. 31–32). Though not explicitly Trinitarian, these three traits point implicitly toward the Christian doctrine of the Triune God: the transcendent *Duad* aligns with God the Father; the spiritual nature of *Duad* resonates with the Holy Spirit; and *Duad*'s immanent involvement through human figures evokes the Incarnation of the Son. This implicit orientation toward Trinitarian theology suggests an openness in Kei cosmology to the Gospel message of God as Trinity.

The communion of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit is a communion of love revealed in salvation history and fulfilled in the Paschal Mystery of Christ. The gift of salvation brought forth by the Triune God is the ultimate reason for Christian thanksgiving, especially as expressed in the celebration of the Holy Eucharist (Martasudjita, 2021, p. 266).

Therefore, the Kei conception of *Duad* and divine blessing can be affirmed, completed, and renewed in the light of the Gospel. In this way, the cultural understanding of *Duad* may be transformed into a Trinitarian theological vision. Through such transformation, the theme of gratitude expressed in *Basar* finds new resonance: it becomes an act of thanksgiving directed toward the Triune God, the giver of salvation for all creation. This is the *Trinitarian dimension* of *Basar*'s message of gratitude as reinterpreted within the Christian constellation of meaning.

Conclusion

This article has examined the *Basar* ceremonial song of the Kei people in Southeast Maluku as a theological object of study within the framework of contextual theology. Employing Robert J. Schreiter's cultural semiotic method, *Basar* was analyzed as a cultural text composed of three core elements: sign (melody), rule (ritual context), and message (life themes), with a particular focus on its expression of reverence and gratitude. These themes do not merely reflect social relationships but signify a spiritual connection to the Divine,

specifically to *Duad*, the Kei people's name for God.

As part of a broader cultural system governed by the customary law of *Larvul Ngabal*, *Basar* embodies deeply embedded religious values within the ethical, social, and spiritual fabric of Kei society. In this context, reverence for community leaders is not merely a human gesture of respect but a form of veneration for *Duad*, since leaders are viewed as His representatives. Similarly, communal expressions of thanksgiving are rooted in the shared belief that all blessings originate from *Duad*, the divine giver of life.

From a theological perspective, the meanings of reverence and gratitude embedded in *Basar* hold transformative potential to be incorporated into a Christian constellation of meaning. Reverence for leaders can be reinterpreted as reverence for Christ, the Head of the Church, while thanksgiving for blessings can be understood in light of the salvific work of the Triune God. In this way, *Basar* transcends its role as a cultural artifact and becomes a channel for faith articulation, making it a genuine source of local theology.

In conclusion, the *Basar* song is not only a valuable expression of cultural heritage but also a vessel of profound religious depth and theological significance. This study has demonstrated that inculturation is not merely about musical adaptation, but a process of deep theological reflection that fosters a dialogical and transformative relationship between local wisdom and the universal tradition of the Church.

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